

Northampton College

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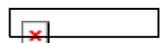
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Basic information about the college



Name of college:	Northampton College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Len Closs
Address of college:	Booth Lane Northampton NN3 3RF
Telephone number:	01604 734 567
Fax number:	01604 734 207
Chair of governors:	Trevor Hunwicks
Unique reference number:	130769
Name of reporting inspector:	Gloria Dolan HMI
Dates of inspection:	9-13 May 2005

Part A: Summary



Information about the college



Northampton College is a large general further education (FE) college situated in the East Midlands. It was created by the merger of the original Northampton College with Daventry Tertiary College on 1st August 2004. Of the 3,533 full-time students, 2,779 are aged 16 to 18. There are 7,164 part-time students (1,495 full-time equivalents), of whom 6,575 are aged 19 and over. Most students live in Northamptonshire, but students also travel from Milton Keynes, Bedfordshire and Warwickshire.

The newly merged college provides courses in all areas of learning except land-based industries. Most areas of learning are provided at both main centres in Northampton and Daventry. The Northampton centre is the largest and offers an extensive range of courses. The college has a third main centre based in temporary accommodation in St Georges, Northampton where many information technology (IT), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and adult and community courses are offered. Two local learning centres in Towcester and Brackley offer mainly IT short courses. The college has an IT learning shop, providing both Learndirect and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded courses, in the centre of Northampton, which it runs in partnership with Moulton College. The college has an established Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in childcare and early years.

There are 443 work-based learners in engineering, business, retail and customer service, hospitality, hairdressing and beauty therapy and health and social care. Additionally, a number of students are based in the workplace in health and social care, but are not on apprenticeship programmes.

The college collaborates with a large number of schools in the Northampton and Daventry areas on 14 to 16 and post-16 provision. The programme now has 724 enrolments.

Some 8% of students are from a minority ethnic background, which reflects the local population, and 10% are of unknown backgrounds.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the quality of education to be good in engineering and health and social care and early years with a contributory judgement of satisfactory provision for health and care. Provision was judged to be satisfactory in the following areas: business and administration, management and professional; information and communications technology (ICT); hospitality, sports, leisure and travel; hairdressing and beauty therapy; visual and performing arts and media; humanities and literacy and numeracy. Work-based learning in engineering is good; it is satisfactory in health and social care and unsatisfactory in hairdressing. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- successful merger

- effective strategic planning

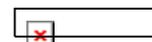
- financial management
- teaching of practical subjects
- actions to improve in-year retention rates
- good links with schools and community organisations
- wide range of full-time courses.

What should be improved

- retention and pass rates
- quality assurance
- training for governors and managers
- identification of need and take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy
- target setting and monitoring of students' progress
- teaching methods to meet individual needs in theory lessons
- management and co-ordination of work-based learning.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

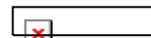


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good. Work-based learning is good . There is good teaching and learning across the curriculum. Retention and pass rates are high and improving. The outcomes of initial assessment are not used effectively in a few lessons. Curriculum management at college is very effective, but there is insufficient planning of training in the workplace.
Business administration, management and professional	Satisfactory. Pass and retention rates are variable, but close to national averages. Teaching is generally satisfactory, but insufficiently related to current business developments. A wide range of courses are offered at levels 1 to 3. Realistic target setting is not always applied when monitoring students' progress.
Information and communications technology	Satisfactory. Teaching is effective in practical lessons and students develop very good skills in using IT applications. A broad range of courses is offered and students have good access to IT resources. Attendance in lessons for full-time students is low. Pass rates are low on many courses, though several have improved in 2004.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on many courses in hospitality and leisure, travel and tourism, but low in vocational sports. Teaching and learning of practical skills are good across the whole curriculum area, but theory teaching is often unimaginative with long expositions from the teacher. Facilities in hospitality are good and reflect the working environment. Indoor accommodation for sport at Northampton is inappropriate for the wide range of courses.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Work-based learning is unsatisfactory . There are high pass rates on many courses, but there is low achievement in work-based learning. Much teaching and learning of practical skills is good, but assessment practices in hairdressing are weak and the management of work-based learning is poor. Many hairdressing students are on the wrong level of course. Specialist accommodation is good at Daventry, but it is unsuitable at Northampton.
Health and social care and early years	Good. Contributory grade for health and care is satisfactory . Contributory grade for work-based learning is satisfactory . There are consistently high pass rates on early years courses. Teaching and learning in early years are particularly good, but too limited a range of teaching methods are used in a minority of lessons overall. Targets for a minority of students are not sufficiently demanding. Work-based learners' skills are developed effectively, but overall co-ordination of the provision is poor.

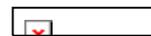
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on many courses, but retention rates are often well below national averages. There is a high standard of teaching and learning in fashion and textiles, drama and dance. Few students receive additional learning support. Much feedback on students' work is too limited.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are close to national averages. Too narrow a range of teaching methods and lengthy expositions by teachers are used frequently in lessons. Teaching is often insufficiently demanding to meet the individual needs of students. Students receive good support and have access to well-devised study materials.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with effective target setting and good use of ICT to promote learning. Pass rates are low on many courses and there is low attendance in literacy and numeracy lessons. Students receive good support in the learning development centre. Courses do not always meet the needs of individual students.

How well is the college led and managed?



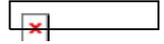
Leadership and management are satisfactory. The merger with Daventry Tertiary College in August 2004 was well managed and ensured a smooth transition. The principal and senior managers provide clear strategic leadership that is understood and accepted by all staff. Curriculum management across the college is of variable quality. Quality assurance procedures are well documented although they are not always implemented effectively. The self-assessment report is too descriptive and fails to make adequate judgements on strengths and weaknesses. The quality of course reviews varies across the college. The college has a high profile in the local community and promotes partnership activity effectively. The college has strong financial management and has maintained category A financial rating for the past three years. Since the last inspection, retention and pass rates in most curriculum areas have improved. The management of work-based learning is poorly co-ordinated. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



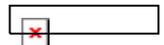
The college's response to education and social inclusion is satisfactory. A clear policy outlines the college's objectives in relation to diversity and inclusion. Faculties now have greater responsibility for considering issues affecting student recruitment and performance, although in some areas this is still not well established. Insufficient actions have been taken to address the disproportionate numbers of male or female students in many curriculum areas. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the local area. A wide range of provision including literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses is offered at college and in community locations to widen participation. Effective additional learning support is provided, but the number of students who take it up is low. The college meets its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and most college sites are fully accessible to people with restricted mobility. Support for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The college meets most of the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. Staff and governors received training on equality and diversity in 2001, but governors have not yet received training on their responsibilities under the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 or on child protection. The college has a race equality policy and action plan. Anti-bullying and harassment policies are rigorously applied.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support for students is satisfactory. Arrangements for pre-entry guidance and advice are good. Induction is well planned and helps students settle into their studies quickly. The identification of students' literacy and numeracy needs is not fully effective. The take-up of additional learning support is low. There is good support for students with a specific learning difficulty or disability. Tutorial provision is satisfactory. Students receive a high level of support from teachers and tutors. Students' progress is monitored regularly. Target setting with students is weak. Students benefit from a good range of well-organised support services such as welfare, careers advice and guidance, and counselling. Support for students applying to higher education (HE) is good. The college has a child protection policy and clear guidelines for its implementation.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- supportive and helpful teachers

- learning resources centre and library

- good choice of courses

- friendly adult atmosphere

- college extras - discount card, free gym, cash machine.

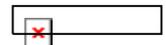
What they feel could be improved

- fewer staff changes

- better arrangements for staff sick cover

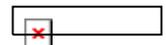
- specialist equipment in some vocational areas
- management of computer space
- quality, price and choice of food in canteen.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole



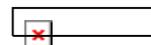
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	65	29	6
19+ and WBL*	68	29	3
Learning 16-18	66	28	6
19+ and WBL*	66	29	5

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. Northampton College and Daventry Tertiary College merged on the 1st August 2004. Merged college performance report data from 2001 to 2003 and college produced data for 2004 were used during the inspection. Since 2001, the number of students completing courses and gaining qualifications has improved at levels 2 and 3 for all students. There has also been improvements on short courses for students aged 19 and over. Student performance for all ages in 2004 was close to, or better than, the national average at levels 2 and 3. There were high numbers of distance learning students at level 1 at Daventry Tertiary College in 2004. Many of these students did not complete their programme and gain qualifications. The proportion of students completing their course and gaining qualifications at level 1 in 2004 was 5% below the national average for students aged 16 to 18 and 13% below for students aged 19 and over.

2. Whilst pass rates were at or better than national averages for all ages at levels 2 and 3 in 2004, retention rates were lower than the national average for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 to 3 and for students aged 19 and over at level 1. The in-year retention rate for the whole college for 2004/05 is high and significantly above the previous year. Most courses have retained over 85% of students.

3. Overall pass rates in work-based learning programmes have been low, but they are improving in the current year. In hairdressing, there were no achievements of apprenticeship frameworks in 2003 and 2004. In the current year, 22 students have completed early and the remaining 68 are making good progress. In health and social care and early years, achievement of frameworks is satisfactory, although slow for advanced apprentices. Achievement is poor for apprentices, but is improving slightly. In engineering, the achievement of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and apprenticeship frameworks are on target to be completed within the planned timescales.

4. Students' attendance during inspection was 77%, the national average for similar colleges. There was over 80% attendance in literacy and numeracy, visual and performing arts and media and hospitality, and sports, leisure and travel, but it fell to 67% in ICT.

5. The proportion of student attainment in lessons judged to be good or better, at 63% was 10% higher than the national average. Many students demonstrate good practical skills. In business, students' work is of a high standard on accounting and administration courses. In ICT, students are confident when using a wide range of software. In engineering, students demonstrate good practical skills when car body painting. Hospitality students have considerable success in competitions and have good skills in food preparation and cooking. Leisure and travel students produce high standards in project work on budget airlines. Sports students are successful in local and regional football competitions. Health and social care students' practical skills are well developed and advanced students work effectively on their own. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students demonstrate high standards of practical skill, but the development of professional working practices is often hindered by unsuitable accommodation. Many students in visual and performing arts and media produce particularly high standards of work in fashion, textiles, drama and dance. Many literacy and numeracy students make good progress towards achieving their individual aims.

6. In engineering, work-based portfolios are well organised. Students' work is of a high standard and they acquire good industrial skills. In health and social care and early years, the development of skills and knowledge by work-based students is particularly good.

7. Key skills achievements have been low in most subjects, with the exception of application of number at level 1 where 66% of students were successful in 2004. In contrast, just 15% of students successfully achieved communication level 1 and 41% IT at level 1. The college has developed more focused strategies to improve key skills. Since February 2005, a new model for teaching key skills has been introduced. Key skills are taught in each curriculum area and are contextualised to the area of learning. Good examples of this practice were seen in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Key skills for work-based students are introduced at the beginning of programmes and taught using contextualised topics and assignments to improve relevance for students. Key skills for work-based students are further developed and assessed in the workplace.

16 to 18 year olds

8. The proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who completed long courses and gained qualifications was consistently below the national average between 2001 and 2003 at levels 1 to 3. In 2004, the proportion was 5% below the national average at level 1, and 2% below the national average at level 3, but had risen to the national average at level 2.

9. Retention rates were generally below the national average at levels 1 to 3 between 2001 and 2003. In 2004, retention rates fell at level 1 to 5% below the national average. The retention rate remained 5% below at level 2. The retention rate at level 3 improved by 2% between 2002 and 2004. It was 3% below the national average in 2004.

10. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved at levels 1 to 3 between 2001 and 2004. In 2003, pass rates were 2% below the national average at level 1 and 4% below at level 3. At level 2, pass rates were just above the national average in 2002 and 2003. In 2004, pass rates improved at all levels. They were 1% below the national average at level 1, 6% above at level 2 and at the national average at level 3. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on short courses were consistently slightly higher than the national average.

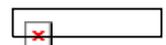
Adult learners

11. From 2001 to 2003, the number of students aged 19 and over who completed their courses and gained qualifications improved to just above the national average at levels 1 and 3. They declined to 4% below the national average at level 2. However, in 2004, the number of students who completed their courses and gained qualifications at level 1 dropped significantly to 13% below the national average. Improvements were made at levels 2 and 3 where rates improved to 4% above the national averages. The proportion of students completing higher level courses and gaining qualifications was slightly higher than the national average in 2004.

12. Retention rates were consistently close to, or above, the national average at levels 1 to 3 from 2001 to 2003 but, in 2004, the retention rate at level 1 was 5% below the national average. The retention rate improved significantly at level 2 in 2004 to 6% above the national average. Retention rates improved over three years and were just above the national average at level 3 in 2004.

13. Pass rates for students aged 19 and over were consistently below national averages at levels 1 and 2 in 2002 and 2003. In 2004, pass rates dropped significantly to 14% below the national average at level 1, but improved at level 2 to the national average. Pass rates at level 3 were consistently above national averages and improved to 4% above average in 2004. Pass and retention rates on short courses were near the national average in 2004.

Quality of education and training



14. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 198 lessons across 9 areas of learning. Of these, teaching was good or better in 66% of lessons, satisfactory in 29% of lessons and unsatisfactory in 5%. This profile is marginally better than the national average for similar colleges. Teaching was of a slightly better quality for students aged 19 and over than for students aged 16 to 18. The best teaching and learning was found on level 1 courses, with 72% of lessons graded good or better. Most teaching was good or better at levels 2 and 3 with 63% and 66% of

for students with 71% graded good or better and 4.8% unsatisfactory. The percentage of good or better theory lessons was significantly lower at 58%, with 8% unsatisfactory. The best teaching was observed in health and social care with 70% of lessons good or better. Humanities was the only area with no unsatisfactory teaching or learning.

15. Overall, teaching and learning across the college is satisfactory. In all areas of learning there are a small number of very good lessons. There is a small amount of outstanding teaching and learning in two areas. In an excellent media lesson on radio, students revised and extended their knowledge in a dynamic lesson. Excellent preparation of a team game based on competitive principles, interwoven with radio clips and humour, led to the full participation of all students. Most teachers have good working relationships with their students. In many practical lessons and a minority of theory lessons, teachers meet students' individual learning needs effectively. A detailed and useful profile of each student is used well in lessons in health and social care and engineering. In a good practical welding session, well co-ordinated team teaching ensured that the needs of each student were met effectively. There is poor behaviour management in a minority of lessons in ICT. Teachers often adapt lessons to meet the needs of less able students, especially at lower levels, but work is sometimes insufficiently demanding for more able students. The teaching of practical skills is good. Many teachers provide confident practical demonstrations which help students to improve their skills. Well-focused questions about related theory were used in a beauty therapy practical lesson to ensure that students provided effective treatments. In many practical lessons, teachers maintain good momentum and, where appropriate, draw on professional experiences to contextualise learning. Role-play about customer service is used effectively in leisure and travel. Many areas link theory to practice effectively, but in business, insufficient examples from the commercial world are used to develop students' understanding of theory and create interest. In ICT, there is insufficient focus on commercial practice for full-time students. Good use is made of ICT in a minority of areas such as health and social care and engineering. In good lessons, questioning techniques are used to check and reinforce learning. Weaker lessons are characterised by lengthy expositions from the teacher, undirected questioning and not enough participation by students.

16. Accommodation and resources are generally good. An effective improvement programme has improved facilities significantly since the last inspection. The college has expanded its accommodation at the Northampton site, acquired sports playing fields and increased car parking spaces. The cafeteria has been extended and an atrium provides additional recreational space for students. All areas at Northampton are suitable for people with restricted mobility. New, modern premises for adult students in Northampton town are in the final stages of completion.

17. Specialist resources are good in engineering, hospitality and in visual and performing arts at Northampton. Information and learning technology (ILT) is particularly good in health and social care. Indoor facilities for sports and the salons for hairdressing and beauty therapy are good at Daventry but unsatisfactory at Northampton.

18. Students' social space is good at Northampton, but at Daventry the students' social room lacks recreational resources. Improvements have been made to the Daventry campus. The reception area has been upgraded and IT connections and telephone links have been improved.

19. The learning resource centres at both sites are good and used well by students. The learning resource centre at the Northampton was improved in 2004 and has long opening hours. Students can access the library's growing number of electronic books remotely through the Internet, but many are not aware of this facility.

20. Access to computers for students and staff is satisfactory. The quality of computer hardware and software is good, although a few computers in classrooms are slow. Many staff are provided with laptops. Good online learning facilities are being developed and in a few curriculum areas such as hospitality they are well used.

21. The college employs 225 full-time equivalent teaching staff. Turnover of staff, at 18%, was higher last year than usual. It is particularly high in health and social care and sport where there are significant numbers of new staff who require additional support. Just over 7% of staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Staff qualifications are satisfactory and improving. Some 64% of

teachers have a teaching qualification and 33% are working towards one or plan to start training in September. Staff development is satisfactory. Industrial updating for staff is not routine and is a particular weakness in business.

22. Assessment, internal verification and standards moderation procedures are sound in most curriculum areas. Comprehensive staff guidelines cover the implementation of college policies. Students have a good understanding of the assessment requirements of their courses. Careful attention to feedback from students has resulted in some changes to assignment schedules. Most assignments are well presented with detailed criteria for marking. Assessment is fair and accurate in most areas. However, assessment practice in hairdressing is unsatisfactory both in college and for work-based learning. Units are completed very late and assessment is often delayed until late into the course. Assessments for work-based students fail to meet the mandatory requirements. In many curriculum areas, the monitoring of students' progress is up to date. Verbal feedback helps students to improve their performance, but the quality of marking and written feedback to students on their work is mixed. In the best examples, students' assignments are marked thoroughly and returned promptly, with useful comments to help them improve in future. However, some work is not returned quickly enough, marking is superficial and insufficient guidance is given to help students improve their performance and grades. Internal verification procedures are well organised. There is appropriate sampling of the work of assessors. Prompt action is taken to rectify issues raised by external verifiers.

23. The college has a broad range of provision in most curriculum areas and is a CoVE in childcare and early years. In business, beauty therapy, hospitality and health and social care, provision ranges from levels 1 to 3 and in visual and performing arts and media, early years and leisure and tourism it ranges from levels 1 to 4. Engineering offers a good range of engineering disciplines and in ICT students can access a wide range of full-time and part-time IT courses at several centres in the region. However, there are insufficient literacy and numeracy programmes of differing lengths to meet the needs and interests of all students. There is little part-time provision in visual and performing arts and media. Work-based learning is offered in a number of areas with substantial numbers in engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy and health and social care and early years. A small Entry-to-Employment programme is also offered.

24. The college is part of a number of learning partnerships and networks which aim attract people from black and minority ethnic groups, adults with low basic skills levels and women into learning. Programmes include workshops for those aged over 45 who are seeking employment and taster courses for the voluntary and community sector. A learning coach brings IT training to businesses, local schools and communities.

25. The range of enrichment activities is narrow and participation by students is low. Only 133 students on average a week use the cross-college enrichment programme.

26. The college offers a broad range of vocational courses to 724 pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools, particularly in engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, ICT, childcare and hospitality.

27. The college has good links with employers and industry in engineering, ICT, and health and social care and early years. This significantly enhances the learning experience for many vocational and work-based learners. There are few academic links with industry and commerce to support the business curriculum. The college responds well to employers' and industry's requests for bespoke learning programmes. For example, the college has run courses for the local borough council and logistics courses for local employers.

28. Support for students is satisfactory. Prospective students receive good information about college courses. Links with schools are good and taster sessions, open evenings and open days are well attended by prospective students.

29. Arrangements for impartial pre-entry guidance and advice are generally satisfactory. However, some students are placed on the wrong level of course, based on their prior experience. Partnership working with the Connexions service is good.

30. Induction is well planned and enables students to settle into their course quickly. The identification of students' literacy and numeracy needs is not fully effective. Full-time and substantive part-time students complete an initial screening to identify literacy and numeracy support needs. However, the take-up of further diagnostic assessment is low. The proportion of students who take the support offered is also low. Where additional support is provided it is generally good. There are good arrangements to provide appropriate support for students who have a specific learning difficulty or disability. The college does not evaluate the effectiveness of learning support sufficiently.

31. Tutorial provision is satisfactory. Most full-time students complete a learning styles questionnaire, but the outcomes are not always used well to plan learning. Student support staff provide specialist inputs on topics such as study skills and lifestyle issues, but not all curriculum areas make sufficient use of these services. All full-time students have timetabled tutorials. Tutorial time is not always used consistently well and the quality of tutorial practice varies widely. Part-time students are supported by teachers on their course. Work-based learning students receive good support from their tutors and from visiting assessors.

32. Students have at least two formal progress reviews a year. Target setting with students to help them improve their performance is weak. Targets are often vague and insufficiently precise. Where good practice is identified it is not always shared sufficiently.

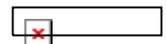
33. All staff have easy access to student records and managers monitor attendance rigorously. Absences are routinely followed-up. Parents and guardians of younger students are kept well informed. College data for 2004/05 indicate that in-year retention rates have improved.

34. Support services are well organised. Advice and guidance are readily available on personal and welfare issues. The college uses independent counselling services and these are well used by students.

35. There is a well-planned careers education programme. However, there is too much variation in the implementation of the programme across curriculum areas. Support for students applying to HE or employment is good.

36. The college has an approved child protection policy and a senior member of staff is the designated child protection officer. A clear guidance document is issued to all staff. Child protection is included in the induction of new staff, but not all staff have attended training sessions. Governors have not received training on child protection. The college undertakes police checks for all staff.

Leadership and management



37. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been largely addressed, although the analysis of data at governor level is at an early stage of development. In August 2004, the college completed a merger with Daventry Tertiary College. The merger was managed well to ensure a smooth transition to the merged college. Skilful planning eased college differences and promoted the ready acceptance of moving to the new organisation by all staff. The college leadership implemented an integrated model effectively from the outset so that staff and managers from both organisations worked together. Good practices and procedures from each former college were identified and quickly adopted college wide. Since the last inspection, the number of students completing their courses and gaining qualifications has improved at levels 2 and 3 to around the national average. In 2003/04, Daventry College had extremely low retention and pass rates at level 1. Managers have taken effective action to deal with the issues. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection to slightly above the national average.

38. The new three-year development plan is comprehensive and identifies four realistic strategic

objectives to reflect national and local educational needs. Each objective has explicit targets for improvement. Performance against targets is monitored effectively. Strategic objectives form the basis of planning for the faculties and business areas. The college has realistic and timely plans to improve its accommodation. In 2004, it acquired and refurbished a neighbouring middle school. A new centre in Northampton town was due to open shortly after the inspection.

39. The management structure provides an effective framework for improvement. The principal and senior managers provide clear strategic leadership which is communicated effectively and understood by staff. Teaching and learning are managed through four faculties. Authority is delegated to heads of faculties.

40. Curriculum management across the college is of variable quality. In engineering, management is effective with a strong emphasis on teaching and learning. There is good management of the CoVE in childcare and early years. In visual, performing arts and media, clear priorities are set for improvement. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, students are disadvantaged by inappropriate accommodation and many students are on the wrong level of course. In sports, leisure and tourism schemes of work are not well planned.

41. The college has comprehensive policies and procedures to assure quality. The self-assessment report is a lengthy, descriptive document that fails to make adequate judgements on strengths and weaknesses. This has been recognised by the college and new procedures were introduced from September 2004. It is too early to assess the impact of the changes. The quality of course reviews is variable across the college. In literacy and numeracy, the course reviews are critical with clarity about how improvements can be made. In ICT, action planning is good. In visual and performing arts and media, course reviews are weak and do not include actions or targets for improvement. Many course reviews overestimate strengths and underestimate weaknesses, making effective action planning difficult.

42. Staff induction is effective. Individual mentors are linked to new staff for the first year of employment. Appraisal is unsatisfactory. All permanent staff should be appraised every 18 months. In 2003/04, just 58% of staff were appraised. Hourly paid teachers have a review meeting during their first six months in post and may request an appraisal interview, but very few avail themselves of this option. The appraisal system lacks rigour. It focuses on personal development rather than quality improvement strategies. Appraisal reviews are not quality assured and their quality is variable. Development needs identified during reviews, through lesson observations or the post inspection action plan, appropriately inform the annual staff training plan. The college has focused on improving teaching and learning since the last inspection. All teachers are supported by the college to gain a teaching qualification and 47 staff are currently in training. Both full-time and part-time teachers are observed teaching. Grades given to many internally observed lessons are too high and substantially higher than those awarded by inspectors. College internal observation judgements lack evidence and are frequently generic.

43. The college has a committed governing body. Governors understand their role and the strategic direction of the college. They monitor the development plan appropriately, but do not seek sufficiently detailed information on areas of underachievement. Governors liaise with senior managers, but they have insufficient knowledge of the college curriculum. The monitoring of financial matters is good. There has been no formal training for governors for many years. Clerking arrangements are effective.

44. The management information system is good. It provides accurate, timely and reliable information on finances and student enrolment and tracking data for staff and governors. All staff have received training on how to use the management information system. The use of data and information is improving. Course tutors, teams and heads of faculty use national averages on retention and pass rates to assess the performance of their courses.

45. The college has policies on diversity and inclusion, child protection and race equality. It has a race equality action plan. The college complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (Part IV) and most of the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. Staff training has been provided on equality and diversity, race relations and disability. However,

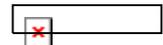
governors have not received training on their responsibilities with regard to race equality or child protection. There is a nominated child protection officer. A comprehensive child protection training document has been provided to all staff and a plan for training sessions is in place. Not all staff have been trained. The accommodation of the college is accessible to all people and some materials are produced in large print, audio tape or community languages. Anti-bullying and harassment policies are applied rigorously. The college has a satisfactory complaints procedure and complaints are dealt with appropriately. However, they are not reported to governors.

46. The college is effective in promoting partnership activity in the community and working with employers. The principal and senior managers serve on several external groups. There are strong collaborative partnerships with schools both in Northampton and Daventry.

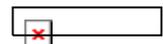
47. Overall, the management of work-based learning is poorly co-ordinated and good practice is not shared. Co-ordination and sharing of information between Training Northants who are responsible for the learners' welfare, and the college departments, who are responsible for learners' assessment, training and achievement, is unsatisfactory. There is no sharing of good practice between assessors in different subjects. Effective strategies have not been put in place at a whole-college level to improve retention rates and achievement of frameworks.

48. Achievement of core funding targets over the last three years has been satisfactory. The college has strong financial management and has maintained category A financial rating for the past three years. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Engineering, technology and manufacturing



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**
Contributory grade for work-based learning is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- high and improving retention and pass rates

- much good teaching

- particularly good resources for teaching and learning

- comprehensive learning reviews for work-based learners

- very effective tracking of students' progress

- very effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment outcomes in a few lessons

- inappropriate accommodation for a small number of theory lessons

- insufficient planning of training in the workplace

- inappropriate signage and stowage in vehicle paint and welding shops.

Scope of provision

49. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in motor vehicle, electrical, electronic and mechanical engineering from foundation to level 4. It provides training for several major, national motor vehicle training companies and offers work-based learning in motor vehicle for apprentices and advanced apprentices. There are 296 full-time students of whom 220 are aged 16 to 18. Of the 656 part-time students, 583 are adults. There are good links with schools and developing provision for young people aged 14 to 16.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass and retention rates are high. Pass rates on full-time motor vehicle courses increased to above the national average in 2004 and although retention rates fell slightly, they are still above national averages. For work-based learners, achievement of NVQs and apprenticeship frameworks should be completed within the planned timescale. Retention rates are satisfactory and are high for those starting in 2003 and 2004. Retention and pass rates show a steady improvement and are above the national average for NVQ level 2 performing engineering operations, the national diploma in engineering and the part-time computer-aided design (CAD) course in 2004. Numbers on some courses are low in 2004 as there is now a greater variety of pathways available.

51. Students' work is of a high standard with diverse evidence such as CAD drawings, parts lists and digital images. Work-based portfolios are well ordered and cross-referenced to the awarding body specification. NVQ performing engineering operations students benefit from a well-structured and detailed workbook system which underpins practical and written course assignments. Students' practical skills are of a high standard.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, technology and manufacturing, 2002 to

2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Motor vehicle servicing, progression award	1	No. of starts	34	33	16
		% retention	74	73	69
		% pass rate	40	58	82
Welding and fabrication practice (1 year)	1	No. of starts	62	66	17
		% retention	68	80	77
		% pass rate	38	30	69
CAD	2	No. of starts	62	72	10
		% retention	81	81	100
		% pass rate	64	84	90
NVQ engineering	2	No. of starts	25	28	30
		% retention	68	71	78
		% pass rate	77	80	88
National certificate in engineering (2 year)	3	No. of starts	45	48	*
		% retention	95**	69	*
		% pass rate	47**	55	*
National diploma in engineering	3	No. of starts	34	40	17
		% retention	67	55**	53
		% pass rate	73	68	89

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* fewer than 15 starters

** college data

Quality of education and training

52. Much teaching is good. Profiles outlining students' preferred learning styles and any other information that may influence their learning are used effectively in planning most lessons. Course schemes of work are provided for students and engineering drawings and notes are professionally presented. ILT is used well in most lessons, but not sufficiently in workshop sessions. In a very good science lesson on mechanical principles, good use was made of ICT to explain simple machines, loads and velocity ratios. Students were highly motivated by the imaginative use of images and artefacts. Very good use was made of questioning to check and develop learning. In a lesson on practical drawing and pattern development, the large group of students were engaged in diverse activities. The teacher supported them well so that they could work at their own level and pace. Students were able to relate new concepts to previous learning effectively.

53. In the few weaker lessons, there is insufficient use of information from initial assessment and students' learning styles. Lessons are not planned effectively to meet individual student needs. A small number of theory lessons are taught in inappropriate accommodation. For example, mathematics is taught in a noisy motor vehicle workshop and students' learning is disadvantaged by their inability to hear the lecturer.

54. Training for work-based learners in the workplace is not sufficiently well structured and there is little co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training. There are no training plans linking the work learners have done in college to work they need to undertake in the workplace.

55. Resources for teaching and learning are particularly good and well managed. Computer-based diagnostic equipment, high-quality training rigs and components reflect industrial practice in motor vehicle as does the equipment in the electronics laboratories. Computer technology is well resourced with a manufacturing cell, rapid prototyping equipment and a good range of modern specification computers. ILT resources are good. Staff are well qualified.

56. Overall, compliance with health and safety regulations is satisfactory, but there is inappropriate signage and stowage in vehicle paint and welding shops. Student work and body panels are stowed inappropriately, partially blocking a fire exit. The welding shop has non-compliance signage at the fire access point. It is currently written in chalk on the wall. The extraction in welding shops is fit for purpose and fully operational.

57. Staff and students understand the assessment process well. Monitoring of work-based learners' progress is good. A well-designed form gives a graphic representation of the progress apprentices are making with their NVQs and this has been further refined to represent their progress with their class work at college. The recording of college-based students' progress is also thorough. Class record sheets are prominently displayed on the walls of some workshops and the students are encouraged to complete them to show their progress. Internal verification is satisfactory.

58. The full-time curriculum offers a good range of courses across a wider range of engineering than usual. National diploma courses are offered in mechanical, electronics, motor vehicle and aerospace engineering.

59. Support for students is good. Full-time students feel that they are well supported by their teachers and tutors. Tutorials are used well for resolving curriculum, key skills and pastoral issues. Reviews for work-based learners are carried out frequently and effectively by occupationally experienced and qualified staff. Evidence is discussed thoroughly and learners are set well-defined short-term goals with clear reference to individual learning plans. Pastoral issues are discussed and there is thorough monitoring of equality.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management in engineering are very effective. Programmes are well planned. The use of advanced teaching practitioners and effective staff development is having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. Staff meetings are frequent and productive. Partnership links with schools, local training providers, employers and engineering networks are good and used to improve the quality of provision. Extensive development work has been undertaken to introduce a full range of programmes for young people aged 14 to 16 from schools, including courses to support general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) in engineering and design.

Business administration, management and professional



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on accounting courses at levels 3 and 4

- good development of professional skills in business administration

- wide range of programmes at levels 1 to 3.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) business
- insufficient linking of teaching and learning to current business developments
- weak target setting for students.

Scope of provision

61. The college provides full-time general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at foundation and intermediate levels, advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national and certificate courses, AS-level and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) courses for 289 students aged 16 to 18 in business, economics and accounting. Full-time courses are also offered in a range of administrative and office skills including specialist courses for legal secretaries for 36 students. Part-time courses are offered in a wide range of administrative, secretarial, management and professional studies including marketing, accounting, management, and teacher training. There are 1,012 students aged 19 and over on these courses.

Achievement and standards

62. Pass and retention rates are generally close to national averages. Over the last three years, pass rates have been variable on many courses. High pass rates have been consistently achieved in accounting at levels 3 and 4. GCE A-level business and NVQ administration level 2 had 100% pass rates last year. However, pass rates on the AS-level business course have been consistently below national averages for the last three years and declined further in 2004. The BTEC national in e-business and access to business course also had very low pass rates. Retention rates have declined in some subjects in 2004, but overall rates are slightly above national averages. In-year retention rates are high. Students' work is generally of a satisfactory standard with high standards being achieved on accounting and business administration. Students on the GNVQ foundation course make substantial progress gaining in both confidence and skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business administration, management and professional, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ business	2	No. of starts	23	19	22
		% retention	78	79	64
		% pass rate	50	67	71
NVQ accounting (one	2	No. of starts	47	56	90

year)		% retention	62	80	86
		% pass rate	97	89	70
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	59	51	46
		% retention	90	96	87
		% pass rate	100	86	78
AS-level accounting (one year)	3	No. of starts	27	25	26
		% retention	89	92	77
		% pass rate	83	52	70
AS-level business studies	3	No. of starts	85	84	74
		% retention	74	75	74
		% pass rate	62	65	58
NVQ accounting (one year)	4	No. of starts	44	47	40
		% retention	91	100	70
		% pass rate	58	53	64

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

63. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The best lessons are well planned with activities that draw upon different learning skills. Students are encouraged to listen, actively participate and learn from each other. Learning is regularly checked through both oral and written activities. Student contributions are reinforced by good use of whiteboards. In one of the better lessons, the tutor gave a series of situation cards to small groups linked to a snakes and ladders game, to check understanding of legal principles. The students gave answers to other members of the group and if they were correct, moved up a ladder or down if they were wrong. This led to enjoyable, demanding, effective learning. In business administration lessons a business-like environment is created with good attention to detail in procedures, appearance, professional behaviour and the high standards expected. Where group work is undertaken, the tasks involved are frequently either too straightforward or not sufficiently clear.

64. In a significant minority of lessons teaching does not fully engage students' interest. Teaching and learning are insufficiently linked to current business developments. Theory is developed without sufficient examples drawn from the real world of business to engender interest and to improve relevance and understanding. There are few educational visits or visiting speakers and many students on vocational courses do not undertake any work experience.

65. Accommodation and specialist resources are good. The model office used by administration students is well managed and offers a realistic environment for them to achieve vocational competencies. Classrooms are attractive with sufficient high-quality furniture and display equipment to ensure students can work in an appropriate business environment.

66. Currently, the virtual learning environment is only used by BTEC business students and is underdeveloped as a resource to support learning. Access to high-quality software and hardware is good. Teachers are generally well qualified for the subjects they teach. New teachers, particularly those teaching accounting, regularly observe the lessons of experienced practitioners, to gain experience.

67. Assessment and monitoring are satisfactory. Assignments are usually returned promptly with constructive comments that allow students to improve their work. However, AS-level business students are not provided with sufficient guidance on how to improve their work. Staff keep good

records of students' assignment and test marks. Internal verification is highly effective in standardising the quality of assessed work on most vocational courses. The use of individual learning plans as a tool to develop and manage learning in most areas is inconsistent and often ineffective. There are few short-term targets in individual learning plans, and long-term targets are too general to be of any value. Written comments are often illegible. The use of individual learning plans in business administration has helped to raise individual standards.

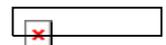
68. The college provides a good range of courses at levels 1 to 3. The GNVQ foundation and NVQ level 1 clerical assistants' programmes are very suitable for both young and mature students and give them an opportunity to grow in confidence and improve their self-esteem. These students are able to move into employment or on to level 2 programmes to further develop their skills. There are good links with University College Northampton, but few academic links with industry and commerce to support the curriculum. Annual parents meetings are held and termly reports are sent to students aged 16 to 18.

69. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Tutorials are considered useful by most students, although some criticise the amount of time devoted to Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Although full-time students all have an initial assessment of basic skills, identified support needs are not always followed up effectively. Students whose first language is not English or have weaknesses in language awareness, are disadvantaged by their unwillingness to take-up support offered and by the lack of specific support available within the business area. Problems occur with their willingness to participate in class discussion, interpretation of examination questions and with language in office skills subjects. Students speak highly of the academic and pastoral support provided by teachers and enjoy their courses.

Leadership and management

70. Leadership and management of courses are satisfactory. There has been a good attempt to draw upon the strengths of each former college to develop the curriculum both in terms of resources and practices. The virtual learning environment previously only available in the Daventry site has been successfully transferred to the whole college. Good course review proforma from the former Daventry College have been adopted, but they are not used consistently. There are regular staff meetings to discuss quality, planning and general course and student progress issues. However, as staff often teach in other curricular areas or are part time, attendance is patchy. Meetings are well minuted with action points that are reviewed. New staff are given a thorough and effective induction. The promotion and monitoring of equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Some tutorial programmes now include diversity issues and take account of recent legislative responsibilities.

Information and communications technology



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high standard of students' skills in IT applications

- effective teaching in practical lessons

- broad range of provision

- good access to IT resources.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many courses

- poor attendance in many full-time lessons

- undemanding teaching of theory

- insufficient links with employers for full-time students.

Scope of provision

71. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses at introductory, intermediate and advanced levels. Full-time courses include: BTEC national diploma for IT practitioners; AS levels and GCE A levels in computing and ICT; BTEC first diploma; AVCE; GNVQ intermediate and foundation levels in ICT. Part-time courses are offered at Northampton and Daventry campuses and at three learning centres. Many part-time courses are studied with flexible attendance arrangements over short timescales, typically less than a year. The college offers a vocational GCSE in ICT to young people aged 14 to 16 under a link provision with local schools. There are 299 full-time students mainly aged 16 to 18 and 2,405 part-time students aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

72. Retention and pass rates are variable. Retention rates on full-time courses at advanced level have improved from previously low rates to above national averages in 2004. In-year retention rates in 2004/05 have also improved on several courses. Although pass rates on a minority of courses are improving, pass rates are low on many courses. For example, pass rates on AVCE double award and BTEC national diploma courses were below national averages for two of the last three years. In 2004, 34 students enrolled on the newly introduced BTEC first diploma, but only 4 passed. However, several courses show significant recent improvement, notably the GNVQ foundation in ICT where pass rates improved from well below the national average in 2002 to significantly above it in 2003/04. Pass rates for qualifications offered in IT learning centres have been consistently below national averages over three years. Most adults studying complete their studies, but many choose not to be assessed for the qualification. Attendance in many full-time lessons is low. During the inspection, almost a third of students were absent from lessons.

73. The overall standard of students' practical ICT work is high. Both full-time and part-time students use a wide range of applications software, including graphics packages and macromedia confidently.

Adult students often use their skills in their workplaces. A group of students with visual-impairments demonstrated good touch-typing skills with confidence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ foundation in IT	1	No. of starts	25	42	30
		% retention	76	71	70
		% pass rate	53	60	90
City and Guilds certificate for IT users	1	No. of starts	530	576	878
		% retention	89	83	44
		% pass rate	45	41	26
GNVQ intermediate in IT	2	No. of starts	91	74	69
		% retention	76	72	78
		% pass rate	64	58	80
AS-level IT	3	No. of starts	35	41	28
		% retention	80	76	71
		% pass rate	64	55	85
National diploma computer studies/IT practitioners	3	No. of starts	42	49	38
		% retention	43	49	58
		% pass rate	61	88	73
AVCE (double award) in ICT (2 years)	3	No. of starts	59	60	46
		% retention	29	38	76
		% pass rate	65	34	49

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

74. Much practical teaching is good. The better teaching is at level 1 where teachers use a variety of methods to stimulate students and maintain their interest. In a GNVQ foundation lesson, students worked enthusiastically using graphical software to enhance photographs on the desktop. The teacher provided a range of practical examples, prepared by other students, to illustrate new techniques. This prompted a lively group discussion and a greater understanding about the benefits and limitations of software. The teacher used oral questioning skilfully to test students' understanding of ICT terminology.

75. More able students who work quickly are frequently not given sufficiently demanding work in theory lessons. Often questions are posed generally to the whole class rather than targeted at individuals. Independent learning skills are not well developed, particularly at level 3. In one lesson, the teacher focused on individual students who had not completed their homework, whilst more motivated and able students wasted valuable time. Full-time students have insufficient opportunities to apply their learning in realistic business situations. Students do not have relevant work experience and there are insufficient references to current commercial practices in lessons.

76. Internal verification, assessment and marking of student work are satisfactory. Monitoring of students' progress towards achieving qualifications is up to date. Verbal feedback is very helpful in guiding students to improve their work, especially at levels 1 and 2, but written feedback is of

variable quality. There are examples of detailed and constructive comments on marked work, but much is too general or provided too late to be of value.

77. Students have good access to ICT resources. Accommodation, resource materials and IT equipment are generally good at all centres. Good facilities and adaptive technologies are available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Open access learning resource centres and outreach centres offer welcoming environments. Course materials are on the college intranet and are accessible from home by both students and tutors. Technician support is readily available. Several teachers are experienced IT practitioners.

78. The college offers a broad range of provision from levels 1 to 3, both full time and part time, at several centres across the region. Progression routes are clearly mapped and understood by students. Opportunities for flexible attendance to study IT user qualifications are offered during mornings, afternoons, evenings and Saturdays. A learning bus with wireless laptops visits isolated communities and several small companies and offers free training. Additional qualifications are offered to many full-time students.

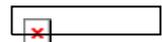
79. Initial assessment and personal support for students are satisfactory, but the take up of learning support is not monitored and used to measure progress. Tutorial support for most full-time students is useful. Students value the support provided in tutorial and key skills sessions to improve their communication skills. The quality and extent of written comments on students' reviews varies. There is good support for students with specific and more complex learning difficulties. Support for part-time students in learning centres is friendly and appropriate for their needs. Progress reviews for part-time students are regular, although comments are often too brief.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is good direction from the lead manager with clear priorities for improvement. Initiatives to share good practice across the four managed areas are emerging, although some are fairly recent and have yet to have an effect. Strategies for improvement include rationalisation of the curriculum across centres, a review of entry requirements for courses, and closer monitoring of students' progress. Several initiatives have led to improvements. For example, close attention to disruptive behaviour has resulted in fewer disciplinary interviews and a race equality plan has improved retention rates for students of Asian and black minority ethnic backgrounds.

81. Course teams meet regularly and communication amongst managers and staff teams, including part-time staff, is good. Data are well used to inform management plans. Demanding targets are agreed and set with course teams and course performance is monitored regularly. Internal lesson observations award unrealistically high grades, but are increasingly rigorous. All teachers have been observed during the past year. Staff development has been used well to support improvements in teaching and learning. However, several teacher absences and changes during the past two years have hampered the rate of improvement.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on many hospitality, leisure and travel courses

- good teaching and learning of practical skills

- good resources for learning in hospitality

- wide range of courses in sport, leisure and travel.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates for vocational sports students

- unimaginative teaching in many theory lessons

- poor indoor sports facilities at Northampton.

Scope of provision

82. The college offers a wide range of courses in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel. These include diplomas, GNVQs, AVCE and NVQs at all levels in food and beverage studies plus a wide choice of subjects and options in sports, leisure and travel. In addition, sport and physical education is offered at AS level and GCE A2. Professional and leisure courses are available to part-time adult students. Short courses are provided in industry-related qualifications including food hygiene. A range of programmes is offered for schools including a vocational GCSE in leisure and tourism for young people aged 14 to 16. The college also has a junior chefs' club and football academy. There are 308 full-time students aged 16 to 18 and 60 full-time students aged 19 and over. Of the part-time students, 20 are aged 16 to 18 and 132 are aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

83. In hospitality, pass rates are high for cake decoration and food preparation and cooking at levels 2 and 3. Retention rates on hospitality courses are generally high, particularly in 2004, with the exception of food preparation and cooking at level 3. Retention rates in sports, leisure and travel are about the national average, but pass rates are more variable. In 2004, the pass rate for the AVCE travel and tourism was well above the national average at 93%, but for the national diploma in sports science it was below. For GNVQ intermediate in leisure and tourism, the pass rate was high in 2004 and the trend has been upwards for the last three years. In hospitality sport, travel and tourism students have been successful in a range of local and national competitions.

84. Students are well motivated and develop good social, vocational and occupational skills. Work in lessons is satisfactory. ICT is used competently for independent study and coursework. Students in hospitality and on level 2 sports courses have good practical and organisational skills. In hospitality, students produce a range of high-quality breads and pastry to commercial standards. They also produce intricate sugar work, artistic chocolate pieces and a variety of both classic and traditional

dishes made from a wide range of ingredients.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Cake decoration - introductory level	1	No. of starts	23	21	17
		% retention	74	86	82
		% pass rate	71	83	100
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	51	21	16
		% retention	75	95	69
		% pass rate	66	80	100
NVQ food preparation and cooking (2 year)	2	No. of starts	53	56	34
		% retention	68	41	71
		% pass rate	97	96	100
NVQ food preparation and cooking (2 year)	3	No. of starts	*	34	16
		% retention	*	32	38
		% pass rate	*	100	100
AVCE travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	15	37	39
		% retention	27	57	59
		% pass rate	100	62	93
National diploma in sports science	3	No. of starts	18	27	22
		% retention	72	56	77
		% pass rate	92	93	59
AS-level sport and physical education	3	No. of starts	24	27	20
		% retention	83	70	90
		% pass rate	65	63	83

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* fewer than 15 starters

Quality of education and training

85. Most teaching of practical skills is particularly good. In hospitality, students benefit from being taught and working in both training and realistic work environments. These include production kitchens, restaurants and food outlets catering for the general public and specialist events and functions. In a well-planned level 3 practical production lesson, students worked very effectively as a team on a dinner menu. Students boned and cut fish, ensuring appropriate portion control, with good awareness of health, safety and hygiene practices. On the Community Sports Leaders' Award (CSLA), students organised a cricket game suitable for children. Good advice and coaching from teachers helped them to make good progress with their batting technique and organisational skills. In a first-aid lesson students became confident in applying the correct technique for mouth to mask resuscitation on manikins after watching the teacher's demonstration.

86. In theory lessons, teaching is often unimaginative and lacking in interest and challenge for the more able students. In some instances, teachers talk for too long with students' passively listening. In others, question-and-answer sessions are unstructured with an over reliance on students taking notes.

87. Resources are satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified. In hospitality, they have recent and relevant industrial experience and keep up to date. The accommodation, including specialist resources, is good. It reflects an industrial setting and realistic work environment. At the Daventry site, accommodation is good for travel and tourism and there are very good indoor sports facilities. Specialist indoor facilities for sport at Northampton are poor, particularly the sports hall. Equipment in the fitness suite is outdated and changing facilities for students are inadequate. IT facilities are good and the library is well stocked with suitable books and periodicals.

88. Students are assessed regularly to check their progress against target grades. Underachieving students are well supported and action plans are devised for improvement. Marking and grading of students' work is rigorous. Homework is set and marked regularly with useful feedback. Examination and internal verification procedures are satisfactory and actions recommended by external verifiers have been followed through.

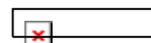
89. The range of courses in hospitality is satisfactory. In sports, leisure and travel, students are offered a particularly wide choice of academic and vocational diplomas and certificates at all levels. In sport, there are opportunities for study in sports science, sports performance and excellence. The range of additional qualifications which students can obtain is extensive and includes football coaching and CSLA.

90. Support for students is satisfactory. Pastoral support for individuals is appropriate. Tutors monitor students' progress well and respond to any issues, including attendance, through regular one-to-one meetings. Students receive suitable help with university applications. Good career and employment advice is provided. Learning support for students with specific additional or special needs is good. Learning assistants provide good support for students to help them gain their qualifications.

Leadership and management

91. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Programme leaders have been in post for less than a year, but are starting to implement college policies and procedures effectively. This has resulted in improvements in attendance and retention rates on some courses. The self-assessment report pays sufficient attention to weaknesses, but the development plans at Daventry lack sufficient detail. However, managers are aware of the issues they need to address including the quality of teaching and learning and the need to maintain and improve overall resources. Lesson observations have been carried out with sufficient rigour and staff development has been undertaken by many staff to increase their industrial awareness and experience. Communication is good with regular meetings. There is a good ethos of care, but insufficient active promotion of equality and diversity.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- high standard of practical skills

- effective teaching in practical lessons
- good specialist accommodation at Daventry
- good academic and pastoral support for students.

Weaknesses

- low achievement in work-based learning
- unsuitable specialist accommodation at Northampton
- unsatisfactory assessment practice in hairdressing
- inappropriate level of course for many level 1 hairdressing students
- poor management of work-based learning.

Scope of provision

92. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses across its two main sites and at a young offenders' institution. Courses are offered from level 1 to 3 and include full-time hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapies and part-time courses in sports massage, body massage, nail technology, manicure and makeup. There are 441 full-time and 561 part-time students. Of these, 258 are aged 16 to 18 and 652 are aged 19 or over. Some 1% of students are male and 6% are from minority ethnic groups. There are 155 work-based learners in hairdressing. The college has a programme for school pupils aged 14 to 16 as part of the Increased Flexibility (IF) programme.

Achievement and standards

93. Pass rates are above national averages on many courses. They are above average on beauty therapy level 2 (1 year), national diploma in beauty therapy and the diploma in holistic therapies. However, pass rates on level 3 beauty therapy and the two-year hairdressing level 2 courses are significantly below the national average. Retention rates across a range of subjects are variable. They do not consistently improve but have generally improved in 2004 and many are around, or above, the national average. The retention rate on the two-year level 2 hairdressing course in

2003/04 was 100%, 72% higher than the previous year, but enrolment has reduced significantly. There was no achievement of full framework qualifications in work-based learning in 2002/03 and 2003/04. In the current year, 22 students have completed their full framework qualifications early and many of the other 68 due to finish this year are making appropriate progress.

94. Students' practical skills are generally developed to a high standard. Students display confidence when performing services. Many are well motivated and work diligently at practical tasks. Beauty therapy students perform waxing and facial treatments effectively and within commercially acceptable timings. Hairdressing students demonstrate good practical skills when colouring and permanently waving hair. The standard of students' written assignments for beauty therapy level 3 is high. Assignments are well illustrated and creative. The best assignments demonstrate evidence of effective research and well-focused findings. Key skills achievements are generally good and assignments are vocationally relevant.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Hairdressing (one year)	1	No. of starts	*	26	59
		% retention	*	62	71
		% pass rate	*	100	98
Hairdressing (one year)	2	No. of starts	114	69	58
		% retention	68	62	74
		% pass rate	88	84	72
Hairdressing (two year)	2	No. of starts	113	105	21
		% retention	30	28	100
		% pass rate	82	62	62
Beauty therapy (one year)	2	No. of starts	69	48	72
		% retention	88	90	75
		% pass rate	82	93	87
Beauty therapy (one year)	3	No. of starts	**	22	27
		% retention	**	95	96
		% pass rate	**	52	73
Certificate in body massage	3	No. of starts	54	69	61
		% retention	80	80	84
		% pass rate	91	93	96

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

95. The teaching of practical skills is effective. Most teachers manage practical lessons well and endeavour to develop their students' understanding of professional standards. In the best lessons, students work competently and independently. In a reflexology lesson, students were clear about their objectives and how to achieve them. The teacher monitored them carefully and supported them individually when necessary so that they were able to provide a high standard of reflexology treatment. In a hairdressing lesson, the teacher demonstrated graduation cutting techniques and gave good individual support to students as they practised on blocks. The teacher's practical

expertise and encouragement motivated the students. Level 1 beauty therapy students have their needs clearly identified and carefully met through the setting of individual learning objectives in practical lessons. In less effective lessons, teachers do not set learning objectives effectively. They fail to ensure that all students participate and do not adequately check students' learning. The teaching of key skills is vocationally relevant and builds appropriately on vocational topics.

96. Specialist accommodation at Northampton is unsuitable. Students often work in conditions which are too cramped and work stations in beauty are sometimes in short supply during client sessions. There is not enough storage space for clients and students belongings and salons are often cluttered. Accommodation is very dated and does not provide a realistic working environment. The extraction of fumes during nail extension lessons is unsatisfactory. Strong odours also spread into nearby treatment rooms.

97. Facilities at Daventry are new, spacious and well designed. The attractive accommodation for both hairdressing and beauty therapy provides high-quality learning environments and industrial-standard, realistic working salons for assessments. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students at both sites use equipment and products of good professional quality.

98. Most staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Unqualified teachers are undertaking training.

99. Assessment practice in hairdressing is unsatisfactory, both at college and for work-based learning. Units are completed very late, theory and practice are sometimes not assessed in good time and assessment is often delayed until the end of the course. Work-based learning students who have been on programme for eight months have still to complete the shampooing unit. Assessments for work-based students do not always follow all mandatory requirements. Many work-based students have too narrow a range of clients to work on during training sessions in their salons to ensure good skills development.

100. Initial assessment of students' literacy and numeracy needs is carried out, but the results for work-based students are issued late and do not inform their training plan in good time. College-based individual learning plans are used effectively when target setting and monitoring students' progress. Work-based learning targets are weak, imprecise and do not help students to improve their performance. Internal verification lacks rigour and does not identify late unit achievement and inconsistent practice.

101. Many hairdressing students are placed on the wrong level course. Some 98 students were placed on a level 1 hairdressing course in September 2004 regardless of their ability or the results of initial assessment. Students are developing skills at level 2, but are only assessed at level 1. Progression rates from level 2 to level 3 hairdressing are very low. Just three students enrolled on level 3 in 2003/04 and the college did not run a level 3 hairdressing course in 2004/05. The range of courses offered in beauty therapy is satisfactory.

102. Students at Northampton undertake periods of work experience, but students at Daventry do not have work experience built into their courses. Students have access to a good range of enrichment activities including visits abroad. Students take additional training in subjects such as auricular ear therapy, St Tropez Tanning and product training from hairdressing and beauty manufacturers.

103. Good academic and pastoral support is available for all students. College students have well-documented individual learning plans and weekly tutorials review their progress and attendance. Support is provided quickly for many students with additional support needs.

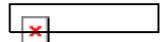
Leadership and management

104. The leadership and management of college provision are satisfactory, but they are unsatisfactory for work-based learning. Co-ordination between on-the-job and off-the-job training is inadequate. Target-setting during progress reviews is imprecise and weak. Employers lack sufficient

understanding of how they can contribute to training. The college has recently increased the number of work-based assessors and students are starting to achieve more quickly.

105. The grades awarded to lessons observed by the college in 2003/04 were much higher than the grades awarded by inspectors. Regular course team meetings provide a forum for discussion of both course issues and individual students. However, good practice is not shared effectively and course reviews are variable. Course reviews are not well established. They lack rigour and are insufficiently specific in identifying actions required to address issues. There are few male students on courses in the curriculum area.

Health and social care and early years



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Contributory grade for health and social care is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- very high pass rates on early years courses

- much good teaching and learning in early years

- good development of skills by work-based learners

- good collaboration between the college, employers and partners.

Weaknesses

- insufficient range of teaching methods in a minority of lessons

- insufficiently rigorous targets for college-based students

- poor co-ordination of work-based learning.

Scope of provision

106. The college provides courses ranging from levels 1 to 4 including certificates, diplomas, NVQs and short courses. Full-time courses include early years, care and health studies. Part-time courses include counselling, NVQs in care and early years plus a vocational GCSE in health and social care for students aged 14 to 16. There are 250 students aged 16 to 18 and 140 students aged 19 and over on full-time courses. There are 300 students aged 19 and over following NVQs in the workplace, 50 work-based learners and 186 pupils aged 14 to 16. The college has CoVE status in early years.

Achievement and standards

107. Pass rates are very high in early years and have been consistently above the national average for three years on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate and the national diploma. Retention rates are satisfactory or better. Pass rates in NVQ levels 2 and 3 in early years, care and counselling are above the national average and retention rates are improving. Elsewhere, pass rates are generally close to the national average with the exception of work-based learning where achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is low, and on the level 3 in health and social care, which is being replaced by the national diploma in health studies. Many of the courses have low numbers. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

108. Most students' coursework at all levels is well structured and presented, showing good development of practical skills. All students develop good professional skills to identify problems quickly and negotiate appropriate solutions. Development of skills and knowledge by work-based learners is particularly good. Learners attend a range of training courses in their workplaces including palliative care and managing children's behaviour and use the information well. Early years students have a good range of skills to meet the needs of children of different ages.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and social care and early years, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Certificate in counselling skills	2	No. of starts	**	23	81
		% retention	**	61	84
		% pass rate	**	100	90
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	37	40	42
		% retention	84	75	83
		% pass rate	100	97	97
First diploma in caring	2	No. of starts	26	*	22
		% retention	85	*	50
		% pass rate	92	*	45
National diploma in early years	3	No. of starts	48	29	45
		% retention	77	93	78
		% pass rate	92	96	100
National diploma in health studies	3	No. of starts	17	34	23
		% retention	76	82	57
		% pass rate	92	100	77
NVQ level 3 care (two year)	3	No. of starts	66	52	35
		% retention	55	46	77
		% pass rate	78	96	100

* fewer than 15 starters

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

109. Much teaching and learning, particularly in early years, is good. Lessons are well planned with a good variety of teaching methods clearly identified to address students' individual learning needs. Learning objectives are clear and teachers effectively check learning. Students work confidently and independently, reading, summarising text and producing informative presentations. Teachers make good use of students' cultural, workplace and life experiences in many lessons and demonstrate the use of lip reading and singing for communication well. Students relate classroom-based activities to practice in the workplace effectively. ICT is well used in the better lessons, particularly in early years.

110. In a minority of lessons, teachers use only a small range of teaching methods. Lesson outcomes are not clearly expressed or sufficiently demanding. Students do not make adequate progress with learning and there is poor production of evidence for key skills, especially in IT. Group tasks are poorly organised and classroom management is sometimes ineffective. Insufficient attention is paid to the needs of the more able students.

111. Resources are satisfactory with extensive use of vocationally relevant equipment. The CoVE has contributed to good resources in early years, particularly interactive whiteboards. Rooms are fit for purpose, although some accommodation lacks natural light and adequate ventilation. There is a good range of texts, journals, videos and additional computers in the learning resource centre. Teachers and assessors have appropriate vocational qualifications and experience, although many are newly appointed and are working towards teaching qualifications.

112. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. Assignments effectively link theory to practice, but do not always show how key skills will be covered. In work-based learning, arrangements for teaching and assessing key skills have improved. Feedback on students' marked work is usually appropriate, but some is too descriptive and superficial. Assessment in the workplace is satisfactory, but some students' reflective accounts duplicate material in assessors' observation reports. Targets for college-based students are insufficiently rigorous. Actions in individual learning plans are too generalised and do not set clear objectives for students to achieve in a specific timescale. Little use is made of value added data. Internal verification procedures are effective.

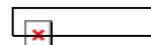
113. The range of courses provides suitable routes for progression through to level 4. Provision in the workplace meets the needs of learners in employment. NVQ students enrol on programmes throughout the year and short courses take place in a suitable range of community locations. The range of additional learning experiences and short qualifications is insufficient. Links with schools are good through the IF programme for young people aged 14 to 16.

114. Guidance and support for students are satisfactory. Tutors plan a variety of individual and group sessions and these contribute effectively to student development particularly when conducted by vocational specialists. In one tutorial, students were organised into groups for a revision quiz and were provided with bells and whistles to indicate correct answers. Although initial assessments identify students with additional learning needs, participation is not rigorously monitored.

Leadership and management

115. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Collaboration is good between the college, employers and other agencies, including the early years partnerships. The CoVE is well managed with a newly appointed co-ordinator who works effectively with local community and partner agencies. Course teams work well together and there is good informal communication. The considerable number of new staff stretches experienced staff as they try to provide the new staff with adequate support. Co-ordination of work-based learning is poor. Data are inaccurate and do not accurately reflect students' progress and achievement. Opportunities for linking evidence from NVQs, key skills and technical certificates are not adequately co-ordinated. Self-assessment reports are too descriptive and lack analysis. Promotion of equality of opportunity is good.

Visual and performing arts and media



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- high standard of students' practical work
- high-quality teaching in fashion, textiles and dance
- well-equipped studios and workshops at Northampton campus.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on a small number of courses
- inadequate meeting of students' needs in a minority of lessons
- insufficient written feedback on students' work
- insufficient support for students with additional learning needs.

Scope of provision

116. Courses provided at the Northampton site include performing arts, music and the arts at level 1, first diplomas in performing arts, music and media and a GNVQ intermediate in design at level 2 and AS-level and GCE A2 courses and BTEC national diplomas in performing arts, music, musical theatre, dance, media, film studies, art, art and design, textiles, three-dimensional design, graphic design, photography and fashion and clothing at level 3. At the Daventry site, there are single vocational awards in acting and music and double awards in performing arts and art and design and also AS-level and GCE A2 courses in art, drama and theatre studies.

117. There are 1,281 students, mostly full time and aged 16 to 18, studying visual and performing arts and media. Of these the largest number, 418 students, study visual arts. Some 355 students study media, 260 study performing arts and 248 study music. There are few part-time or adult students. School pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools attend courses in the arts at college.

Achievement and standards

118. Pass rates are above national averages on many courses. For example, pass rates on AS-level art studies, GCE A2 media, national diplomas in design, media and performing arts are high and between one and 10% above the national average in 2004. Retention rates on a small number of courses, such as the GNVQ intermediate art and design and AS-level art studies/fine arts, have been significantly below the national average for a number of years. Pass rates for key skills are low. However, online testing has recently been introduced and key skills have been integrated with a number of areas to good effect. During the current year, there are 100% pass rates in key skills tests in the national diploma in performing arts and musical theatre.

119. Students work with confidence and many have developed skills of a high standard. Students have produced some vibrant and colourful work in fashion and textiles and also some sound photography and media.

120. First diploma performing arts students were focused and disciplined in their rehearsal of a controversial piece of documentary theatre, skilfully creating clear cut, authentic characters. Students in fashion and textiles worked independently and with very high levels of skill to produce high-quality garments for their impending fashion show.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	44	39	24
		% retention	64	74	54
		% pass rate	100	76	100
First diploma in performing arts	2	No. of starts	40	52	50
		% retention	80	88	74
		% pass rate	97	78	73
AS-level art studies/fine arts	3	No. of starts	140	130	200
		% retention	84	69	60
		% pass rate	74	69	89
AS-level media studies	3	No. of starts	57	64	110
		% retention	79	66	75
		% pass rate	91	90	87
GCE A2 media studies	3	No. of starts	31	24	27
		% retention	90	100	93
		% pass rate	100	96	96
National diploma in design	3	No. of starts	47	59	40
		% retention	83	75	83
		% pass rate	97	100	97
National diploma in performing arts	3	No. of starts	81	92	83
		% retention	49	59	78

		% pass rate	90	81	89
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Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

121. Much teaching of practical subjects is good. In these lessons, students are highly motivated. They work independently, developing good skills and produce work of a high standard. In one radio lesson, the teacher set up a game based on increasing audience listening figures. Students were allocated to teams and the game was used effectively as a vehicle for revision for their forthcoming examination. Students joined in enthusiastically and extended their knowledge through a fun-filled and enjoyable lesson. There is high-quality teaching in fashion, textiles and dance. In a GCE A2 dance lesson, a visual timeline of Alston's productions helped students recognise the influences upon his work and his developing characteristic style. In a musical theatre lesson teachers worked together effectively to help students produce a sequence based on *Fame* for their final project. Their rehearsal was accomplished and mirrored professional standards.

122. The theoretical content of a number of lessons is inadequately planned and they fail to meet individual students' needs. In these lessons, students lose interest and do not make sufficient progress. In one lesson, the teacher talked at length, answering his own questions, while students remained unresponsive. Students complete a preferred learning styles questionnaire, but the outcomes are not used effectively when planning lessons.

123. Many staff are practitioners and bring current experience into their teaching. Staff and students have a mutually respectful and friendly relationship and students feel able to seek advice as needed.

124. Assessment is fair and accurate. Assignments are well presented with clear criteria and detailed information to help students to self-assess their own work. A minority of written feedback from teachers fails to provide sufficient information to help students to improve their performance. The return of work is sometimes slow.

125. Students participate in a wide programme of extra curricular performances, dance and fashion shows, tours and exhibitions which positively extend their experiences. For example, drama students organised and performed a tour about drug awareness to 45 local schools. A highly successful gig for the Tsunami disaster raised over £700 on the night and from the sale of a CD recorded for the occasion. Fashion students mount an annual show in a town centre venue. The show, the culmination of their course, is always sold out and garment production is of a professional standard.

126. Accommodation is good at the Northampton campus and studios and workshops are clean, bright and well resourced. Art and design studios are vibrant with well executed and colourful examples of students' work on display. Music technology is equipped to a high standard. Photography studios are inadequate for the number of students using them. The whole area of learning is supported effectively by technicians.

127. Academic and pastoral support are generally satisfactory. Students are assessed for their literacy and numeracy skills and their needs are identified. Few students, however, avail themselves of the support available. Many students with additional needs do not receive appropriate support. Tutorials have a narrow focus on reviewing student progress and do not cover wider issues effectively.

Leadership and management

128. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff roles and responsibilities are clear and priorities for improvement are detailed with specific actions identified for improvement. Specific attention has been given to improving retention rates and in-year retention rates have improved significantly to 89% overall. Regular team meetings take place to inform staff and involve them in implementing changes for improvement. Pupils from local schools attend college courses, but they

often arrive after the start of the lesson, disrupting learning. Course reviews and self-assessment produced by course teams are weak. They do not always include actions or targets for improvement. The self-assessment report does not reflect the area. It is confined to data with little or no qualitative evaluation.

Humanities



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on AS-level and GCE A2 sociology in 2004

- good use of study materials to reinforce learning

- good academic support for many students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on GCSE law and GCE A2 history

- narrow range of teaching methods

- low attendance.

Scope of provision

129. The college offers AS-level and GCE A2 courses in psychology, sociology, history, and geography. It also offers the humanities and social sciences access to HE (access to HE) course. The business studies faculty offers AS-level and GCE A2 law and the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) law courses at levels 2 and 3. There are 538 full-time students. Of these, 297 are studying on AS-level courses, 133 on GCE A2 courses, 42 on access to HE and 66 on law courses. There are also 170 students, mostly aged 19 and over, on part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

130. Retention rates have improved and are broadly similar to the national average. Pass rates were high in AS-level and GCE A2 sociology in 2004. Pass rates for AS-level sociology are significantly

above the national average and for GCE A2 they are slightly above and have high retention rates. Pass rates on GCSE law and GCE A2 history have been below the national average for three years. Overall attainment is broadly satisfactory.

131. Many lessons cover revision topics in which students demonstrate appropriate recall and understanding. In an AS-level sociology revision lesson, most students produced concise summaries of data tables on gender differences in schooling. In a research skills lesson, access to HE students' research projects were well presented with clear referencing and bibliographies. Attendance, at 70%, is significantly below the national average for humanities. Actions are being taken to address this issue, but the new arrangements are not yet having a positive effect on attendance.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCE A2 psychology	3	No. of starts	66	61	68
		% retention	77	97	90
		% pass rate	71	92	90
GCE A2 history	3	No. of starts	22	17	27
		% retention	77	88	95
		% pass rate	88	80	80
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	69	94	60
		% retention	62	72	75
		% pass rate	51	69	93
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	28	37	39
		% retention	68	57	69
		% pass rate	79	76	74
Access to HE	3	No. of starts	23	36	33
		% retention	100	61	70
		% pass rate	70	81	70

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* fewer than 15 starters

Quality of education and training

132. All teaching is satisfactory, but little teaching is very good and none is outstanding. In the best lessons, students are engaged and involved in different activities which encourage them to learn from each other. The pace of these lessons is good. In an ILEX revision lesson, students explored different techniques for revising and recalling legal terms and concepts. They used them well at the end of the lesson to revise legal cases. In a large class for an AS-level psychology lesson, students in pairs answered questions effectively on research techniques within tight time constraints set by the teacher. The atmosphere was very productive with students producing very good answers.

133. The range of teaching methods used by teachers is narrow. In most lessons, the teacher does too much and too few activities fully involve and engage students. Insufficient account is taken of the wide range of students' abilities and needs. There is little use of ILT.

134. Study materials are used well to reinforce learning. Revision packs are thoughtfully devised and are used effectively in revision lessons. Homework tasks are also well designed. Humanities and social science teachers and students make particularly good use of the library facilities and its E-

resources to support learning and research. There is an appropriate number of humanities text books and, additionally, the Northampton site has a good range of social science and humanities journals and magazines. Classrooms on both sites are spacious and equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors. Most rooms at Northampton have projectors, televisions and video recorders. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. All staff have relevant first degrees and either have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications.

135. Assessment is satisfactory. Students' work on AS-level and GCE A2 courses is marked adequately with an indication to students of how to improve their grades. On access to HE, teachers give useful prompts for improvement on the first drafts of assignments, but give insufficient detail on the final draft on how the work could be improved for next time. Assessment on some of the diploma in law and legal studies courses is weak with only brief comments on how students could improve their work. Opportunities to cover key skills are recorded on lesson plans and referred to on assignments briefs, but students are not sufficiently reminded and directed about how to incorporate the evidence into their work. Students' progress is well monitored through meetings each term. Students are clear about their target grades and their progress in achieving them.

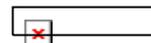
136. The college offers a small range of subjects at AS level and GCE A2 level. Over 80% of the students on AS-level and GCE A2 courses are studying a few subjects including psychology, history, and sociology. There is little provision at level 2 apart from law. There is only one higher level course in law. Enrichment opportunities are satisfactory. A few courses include specific curriculum-related activities, such as visits to the law courts for law students and trips to universities for the access to HE students. The college-wide enrichment programme is not well used by humanities students.

137. Academic support is good for many students. Students receive good individual subject specific support and extra lessons are provided for those who need it. Before examinations, additional support lessons are available. Guidance and pastoral support for students are satisfactory. All courses have an appropriate induction which is provided through the tutorial system. Insufficient advice is provided for some GCE A-level students on alternative progression routes to university.

Leadership and management

138. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Communication is good between the teams on both sites. Staff appraisal and staff development are satisfactory. Staff attend regular whole college and team development events as well as examination board training. The self-assessment process is insufficiently judgemental and the report is too descriptive. Overall equality of opportunity is satisfactory. However, in 2004, the achievement of minority ethnic students on the access to HE course was significantly less than white students. The achievement of male students is also lower than female students. The college is working on improving this through better monitoring of performance in tutorials.

Literacy and numeracy



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good use of ICT to promote learning

- effective target setting and monitoring of students' progress

- good support in learning development centre

- well-planned staff development.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many key skills courses

- low attendance in literacy and numeracy lessons in the community

- inadequate meeting of students' needs in a minority of lessons

- insufficiently flexible provision.

Scope of provision

139. There are currently 2,165 students enrolled on literacy and numeracy, GCSE English and mathematics, courses for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and key skills courses. The college offers courses at pre-entry and entry level, level 1 and level 2. There are 1,377 full-time students. Some 1,194 students are aged 19 and over. Students aged 16 to 18 mainly attend the Northampton College site. Courses are held at Northampton, Daventry, St George's, two learning centres and in the community.

Achievement and standards

140. Retention rates are close to, or above, national averages in all subjects. Retention rates on literacy and numeracy courses at entry level are consistently well above national averages and were 14% and 15%, respectively, above average in 2004. The percentage of A* to C passes in GCSE English and mathematics has improved to slightly above the national average in 2004. In the key skill application of number level 1, the pass rate, at 54% in 2004, was 33% above the national average. The pass rate for communication level 1, at 15%, was very low. Pass rates for level 2 application of number and communication were low at 21% and 33%, respectively, in 2004. Pass rates for literacy and numeracy courses at entry level were significantly above national averages in 2004.

141. Attendance rates for literacy and numeracy in the community was low at around 50%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in literacy and numeracy, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
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Literacy (OCR test)	entry	No. of starts	*	235	179
		% retention	*	74	69
		% pass rate	*	97	88
Numeracy (OCR test)	entry	No. of starts	*	93	63
		% retention	*	77	65
		% pass rate	*	79	95
Application of number (key skills)	1	No. of starts	*	125	129
		% retention	*	92	95
		% pass rate	*	49	54
Communication (key skills)	1	No. of starts	*	192	142
		% retention	*	96	95
		% pass rate	*	39	15
GCSE English grades A* to C	2	No. of starts	228	282	202
		% retention	71	67	72
		% pass rate	45	44	54
GCSE mathematics grades A* to C	2	No. of starts	370	382	300
		% retention	70	65	68
		% pass rate	23	32	43

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

142. Many lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are understood by students. Structured tasks engage students and reinforce their skills. In literacy and numeracy lessons for adults and for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, imaginative and relevant topic work includes activities which develop and motivate students well. Students participate well in lessons and make good progress. Individual learning plans are generally well written with agreed learning targets for every student. In the best lessons, individual learning aims are highly specific and are taken account when they are planned and taught. In many lessons, students work co-operatively and teachers have good classroom management skills using a variety of methods such as work in pairs and groups and individual exercises to ensure students are learning effectively. Teaching staff and support workers use appropriate questioning techniques and explanations are clear and concise. In good lessons, positive relationships between students and teachers increase the confidence of students in their abilities and promote further learning. In a lesson for entry to employment (E2E) students, the teacher ensured that students identified and expressed what they achieved during the day.

143. In weaker lessons, lesson planning does not take sufficient account of specific objectives for individual students. In these lessons, teaching fails to meet the individual needs of students, and activities are too proscriptive and dependent on the tutor to direct them.

144. Resources for learning are good overall and the use of computers effectively assists learning in many lessons. Computers are used well by students in many lessons for both numeracy and literacy. In one lesson, students researched information on homonyms. They printed off fact sheets and completed puzzles and quizzes.

145. There is a professional focus for adult students at the St George's Centre, with extensive, high-

quality displays of students' achievements and reference materials. Accommodation on the Northampton site is adequate, but not all classrooms have the same quality displays. A cramped classroom and constant interruptions at a centre in the community created a barrier to learning.

146. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Initial assessment and diagnostic assessment is thorough and effective. Students help in the construction of their individual learning plan that becomes a focus for their studies. Targets on adult students' individual learning plans are sufficiently demanding, written with a vocabulary that students understand and carefully cross-referenced to the adult core curriculum in literacy and numeracy.

147. Provision is not sufficiently flexible. There are too few programmes of differing lengths to meet the needs and interests of all students, although provision in the community is developing. The centre at St Georges is good for students who prefer community learning to college-based courses. It provides suitable routes for progression. There are a small number of other community venues, with plans to develop community provision further. For example, there is a work-based Skills for Life course with the local bus company.

148. Guidance and support for students on personal and academic issues are good. Support and intervention by staff in lessons is appropriate and timely. Effective support encourages students who receive additional learning support to complete their course. The use of the learning development centre for additional support is particularly effective. Referral of students to the centre is systematic, with students quickly receiving appropriate support. Monitoring of students' progress is good. One student with high levels of anxiety about an imminent mathematics examination had her anxiety skilfully reduced by the support tutor.

Leadership and management

149. Leadership and management are effective. The management and planning for curriculum changes has been effective. Staff are aware of the changes to the structure and development of the national Skills for Life strategy. Extensive training for staff on Skills for Life issues is in progress. Both regional and national sources are being used, including core curriculum, planning individual learning, and key skills. The self-assessment and review of the provision for literacy and numeracy is critical, and clear about how further improvement can be made. The process of self-assessment involves staff fully. Staff meetings focus on making improvements and the sharing of good practice. Equality of opportunity is promoted through materials used in sessions that give a positive message about students achieving their potential in an increasingly diverse and multi-cultural society.

Part D: College data

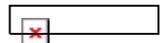
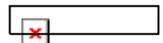


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2003/04



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	11	44
2	31	25
3	57	25
4/5	0	2
Other	1	4

Total	100	100
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Source: provided by the college in 2005

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2003/04

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	962	524	6
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	26	79	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	266	642	4
Business administration, management and professional	509	1,878	9
Information and communication technology	992	3,960	19
Retailing, customer service and transportation	13	221	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	917	1,873	11
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	342	611	4
Health, social care and public services	595	4,044	18
Visual and performing arts and media	1,106	331	6
Humanities	573	244	3
English, languages and communication	747	639	5
Foundation programmes	523	2,150	10
Other	14	1,137	4
Total	7,585	18,333	100

Source: provided by the college in 2005

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year	
		16-18	19+

		2002	2003	2004	2002	2003	2004
1	Starters excluding transfers	533	643	501	2,547	3,225	2,835
	Retention rate %	77	74	71	80	82	66
	National average %	76	76	76	71	71	71
	Pass rate %	65	72	72	51	68	63
	National average %	69	73	73	70	77	77
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,387	1,387	1,438	2,475	1,830	1,630
	Retention rate %	69	66	66	71	65	73
	National average %	71	71	71	68	67	67
	Pass rate %	71	75	79	68	69	73
	National average %	70	73	73	71	73	73
3	Starters excluding transfers	2,799	2,687	2,626	2,104	1,888	1,580
	Retention rate %	70	73	74	68	70	70
	National average %	77	77	77	70	69	69
	Pass rate %	75	76	80	76	75	78
	National average %	77	80	80	71	74	74
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	15	124	140	129
	Retention rate %	*	*	47	79	81	69
	National average %	*	*	74	68	69	69
	Pass rate %	*	*	57	53	54	60
	National average %	*	*	68	54	58	58

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 2001 to 2003: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.

2. College rates for 2002 to 2004: College ISR.

** numbers too low to provide a valid calculation.*

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

				1
Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of

	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	sessions observed
Level 3 (advanced)	66	29	5	94
Level 2 (intermediate)	63	33	4	54
Level 1 (foundation)	72	21	7	29
Other sessions	60	35	5	20
Totals	66	29	5	198

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